

## EXAMPLES OF PATIENTS HARMED BY MEDICATIONS PURCHASED ONLINE

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These are just a few illustrations, in chronological order, of the serious and growing global problem of illegal online drug sellers.

1. On February 12, 2001, U.S. citizen Ryan Haight died from adverse reactions to painkillers that he purchased over the Internet. He was only required to fill out a questionnaire that was “examined” by a doctor who had never met him.<sup>1</sup>
2. On December 17, 2006, Craig Schmidt, a 30-year-old plastics salesman, purchased Xanax (an anxiety drug) and Ultram (a painkiller) from an online drug seller without seeing or speaking to the doctor that prescribed the medications. After taking the drugs, he nearly died and has been left permanently impaired with brain damage that inhibits him from driving or even walking without stumbling.<sup>2</sup>
3. Marcia Bergeron, a Canadian resident and US citizen, died in 2006 from heavy metal poisoning caused by the contaminated prescription medications she had purchased from an illicit online pharmacy. Otherwise healthy, the coroner determined that Bergeron died of cardiac arrhythmia caused by metal toxicity from counterfeit medication. According to the coroner, the website where Marcia bought her medicines looked reputable as did the box of pills, but the drugs were actually shipped from overseas and had high levels of lead, titanium, and arsenic, which caused her death.<sup>3</sup>
4. On May 22, 2008, a man from Wichita, Kansas died from an accidental overdose of muscle relaxants he received from an online pharmacy. He obtained these drugs without ever visiting a doctor. The man's wife described her husband as "an addict ----and that the Internet sites that sold him the drugs were his pushers."<sup>4</sup>
5. Steven Kovacs was a 22-year old aspiring psychologist in New York when he started buying medication online after first being prescribed Adderall, used to treat attention-deficit

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<sup>1</sup> “Experimentation Turns Deadly for One Teenager,” Washington Post (October 21, 2003); available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/28/AR2007062801395.html?noredirect=on>

<sup>2</sup> “Online Extra: The Deadly Side Effects of Net Pharmacies” Bloomberg Businessweek (December 18, 2006); available at <http://www.businessweek.com/stories/2006-12-17/online-extra-the-deadly-side-effects-of-net-pharmacies>

<sup>3</sup> “Counterfeit Pills Bought Online Leads to Death, Coroner Confirms,” The Times Colonist (July 6, 2007); available at <http://www.canada.com/victoriatimescolonist/news/story.html?id=05142ca2-9796-4868-bf42-76e939915fa5&k=29039>. This medicine was contaminated with significantly high levels of metal.

<sup>4</sup> “Widow: My Husband Died from Online Drugs” CNN (May 22, 2008); available at <http://www.cnn.com/2008/HEALTH/05/21/online.drugs/index.html?ref=allsearch>. This drug was misused and abused. The medicine was purchased online without a doctor's visit or a prescription.

hyperactivity disorder, and Xanax, used to treat anxiety. Steven died of a prescription drug overdose on July 8, 2009 after mixing, Adderall, Xanax and OxyContin.<sup>5</sup>

6. In January of 2010, 150 patients were admitted to hospitals in Singapore after taking counterfeit Tadalafil and herbal preparations that claimed to cure erectile dysfunction. Seven (7) of the patients were comatose and four (4) subsequently died from the online drugs which contained powerful ingredients used to treat diabetes.<sup>16</sup>
7. On June 3, 2011, an emergency room doctor, from Texas, suffered a stroke from ingesting counterfeit Alli from *www.2daydietsshopping.com*. The counterfeit Alli was produced using the controlled substance sibutramine, rather than the approved ingredient orlistat, and then shipped to the US for redistribution. Two individuals operated the site. The first is a Chinese citizen who has been sentenced to 7 years in federal prison, \$504,815.39 in restitution to victims, and deportation following his sentence. The second US citizen received 3-years probation.<sup>7</sup>
8. On April 4, 2012, a mother and son in Los Angeles were looking for cold medication. They purchased and fell victim to a counterfeit drug "vitamin injection." The victim's heart rate increased rapidly, experienced severe headaches, dramatic weight loss, pass-outs and numbness in lips. The victim was eventually hospitalized.<sup>8</sup>
9. On April 23, 2013, Sarah Houston, a 23-year old medical student in the United Kingdom obsessed with her weight, purchased DNP, a deadly diet pill, through an online drug seller. The pill, sold as a weight loss aid through many illicit online pharmacies, is actually a pesticide with lethal consequences to humans. Ms. Houston died the day after a bout of breathlessness, icteric sclera and hyperthermia, symptoms she had previously experienced.<sup>9</sup>
10. In November 2014, Aidan Karpenko, 19, was found dead just hours after taking a single Etizolam pill that was purchased by his friend on the Internet. Etizolam is a medication used to treat anxiety, insomnia and panic attacks. The drug is not licensed or regulated in the UK; however it is licensed in Japan and India.<sup>10</sup>
11. On January, 3, 2015, Kelly Best, a 19-year-old man, died after taking counterfeit OxyContin that contained a high dose of a different drug. Best is the third person in Saskatoon to be killed by the pills within 6 months according to Canadian police.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "Mom, Schumer urge Web Pharmacy Crackdown," *Newsday*, United States (July 10, 2011); available at <http://www.newsday.com/long-island/mom-schumer-urge-web-pharmacy-crackdown-1.3016581>. This medicine was obtained without a prescription and was abused because online prescription drugs were easily accessible.

<sup>6</sup> "Counterfeit Internet Drugs Pose Significant Risks and Discourage Vital Health Checks," *Science Daily* (January 20, 2010). <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/01/100120085348.htm>. This contaminated medicine, claimed to cure erectile dysfunction contained a powerful drug used to treat diabetes.

<sup>7</sup> "June 3, 2011: Chinese National Sentenced to Federal Prison for Trafficking Counterfeit Pharmaceutical Weight Loss Drug" U.S. Department of Justice (June 3, 2011); available at <http://www.fda.gov/ICECI/CriminalInvestigations/ucm257912.htm>. This medicine was contaminated with significantly high levels of metal. The patient suffered a stroke after ingesting the medication.

<sup>8</sup> "Cracking Down on Counterfeit Drugs" *San Diego Union-Tribune* (April 4, 2012); available at <http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2012/apr/04/cracking-down-counterfeit-drugs/?page=1#article>. This medicine was contaminated.

<sup>9</sup> "Banned slimming drug kills medical student: Coroner attacks online dealers who target the vulnerable" *The Daily Mail*, United Kingdom (April 22, 2013); available at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-2312986/Sarah-Houston-Banned-slimming-drug-DNP-kills-medical-student-coroner-attacks-online-dealers-target-vulnerable.html>. This medicine was misused. The patient took both anti-depressants and a pill marketed as a weight loss aid containing lethal ingredients.

<sup>10</sup> "One pill can kill" warning after death of popular Chesterfield teen" *Derbyshire Times* (November 27, 2014); available at <http://www.derbyshiretimes.co.uk/news/grassroots/one-pill-can-kill-warning-after-death-of-popular-chesterfield-teen-1-6973111>.

<sup>11</sup> "Counterfeit OxyContin claims another life in Canada" *Securing Industry* (January 12, 2015); available at <http://www.securindustry.com/pharmaceuticals/counterfeit-oxycontin-claims-another-life-in-canada/s40/a2233/#.VoBtZVjmo-x>.

12. Emily-Sue Thomas, 18, became violently ill after taking a weight-loss pill that she purchased online. Thomas said she became interested in the drug after viewing an advertisement on her Facebook page claiming that the drug was popular with celebrities.<sup>14</sup>
13. On April 12, 2015, Eloise Parry died after consuming “diet pills” that she purchased over the Internet. The police are investigating the case and believe the pills contain the highly toxic substance, dinitrophenol or DNP.<sup>13</sup>
14. Michael Thompson, a Nova Scotia man, died on March 18, 2015, of an accidental overdose. Thompson was addicted to prescription drugs and his family received an alarming package in the mail just two days after his death. The envelope was from reChem Labs and contained what they thought was the drug equivalent to Avitan, an anti-anxiety medicine. After analysis it was found to be Etizolam, a drug 10 times more potent than Valium. Etizolam is not approved for sale in either the U.S. or Canada.<sup>12</sup>
15. David Connell, 21, died after taking too much etizolam, which is approved in Japan and India but banned for human use in most of Europe. Mr. Connell had bought the drug online from a Scottish company for £43 a few days before his death, after researching tips to help anxiety on the internet. After his body was discovered, police found a clear bag labelled ‘etizolam: reagent only. Not for human consumption’ in his bin, along with a blue, granular substance around his body. The drug is up to ten times more powerful than diazepam.<sup>15</sup>
16. In February 2017, 21-year-old Bethany Shipsey died after consuming 2,4-dinitrophenol (DNP), an industrial strength pesticide, that was purchased from an online site.<sup>16</sup>
17. Over a two week period in late 2017, the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations was able to identify seven confirmed synthetic opioid-related deaths that were linked back to online sellers of illicit narcotics. The report outlines the death of a 49-year-old Ohio resident that purchased roughly \$2,500 of synthetic opioids from an online seller over a 10 month period, receiving eighteen packages in total. The cause of death for this Ohioan, according to the autopsy report, was “acute fentanyl intoxication.” In addition, a Michigan man sent \$400 to an online seller in late 2016 and received several packages believed to be synthetic opioids. According to the report, just one day before his death, this individual died of an accidental overdose of multiple drugs, including a fentanyl analogue.<sup>17</sup>
18. On March 28, 2018, 34-year-old Brian Parker and 30-year-old Victoria Koleski of Long Island City, New York plead guilty to their roles in distributing synthetic opioids that resulted in the death of

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<sup>14</sup> “Health professionals urge the public to steer clear of ‘dangerous’ online slimming pills” Wales Online (March 26, 2015); available at <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/health/health-professionals-urge-public-steer-8926003> .

<sup>13</sup> “Warnings after student ‘diet-pills’ death” Yahoo! News (April 21, 2015); available at <https://uk.news.yahoo.com/warnings-student-diet-pills-death-092436702.html#RFWMuwe>.

<sup>12</sup> “Research chemicals’ making their way into illicit drug markets, police say” Yahoo! News (October 1, 2015); available at <https://ca.news.yahoo.com/research-chemicals-making-way-illicit-090000428.html>.

<sup>15</sup> ‘First Class’ Student Died After Taking Anti-Depressants Bought Online to Combat Exam Stress (January 22, 2016); available at <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/first-class-student-died-after-7223588>.

<sup>16</sup> “Much-Loved Daughter Bethany Shipsey Overdoses on Online Diet Pills (January 8, 2018); available at <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/much-loved-daughter-bethany-shipsey-14127508>.

<sup>17</sup> Combatting the Opioid Crisis: Exploiting Vulnerabilities in International Mail – Staff Report (January 2018); available at <http://www.hsgac.senate.gov/download/psi-report-combatting-the-opioid-crisis>.

a customer in Madison, Wisconsin. These substances were purchased through two of Parker's online companies, Unbeatablechems and RC Powders.<sup>18</sup>

19. On April 11, 2018, documented Lakeside gang member Uriah Odish was indicted by a federal grand jury for selling fentanyl that led to the death of a 25-year-old La Mesa woman. Odish is the fourth person since January to be charged in the Southern District in California with Distribution of Fentanyl Resulting in Death.<sup>19</sup>
20. On April 25, 2018, 32 individuals were charged with participating in a fentanyl trafficking conspiracy that caused death. Sergio Martinez of Lawrence, Massachusetts, one of the conspiracy's leaders, was charged with aiding and abetting a distribution of fentanyl that resulted in death.<sup>20</sup>
21. On May 21, 2018, Vincent Koh, M.D., and his wife and office manager Milly Koh of Poughkeepsie, New York, were sentenced for delivering misbranded and foreign oncology drugs to their patients. The couple purchased the unapproved drugs from a foreign source with improper labeling and administered them to cancer patients.<sup>21</sup>
22. On July 13, 2018, CanadaDrugs.com is scheduled to shut down after investigators found that the site was selling two counterfeit cancer drugs with no active ingredient.<sup>22</sup>
23. Two people in Akron, Ohio fatally overdosed on Acetyl fentanyl purchased through one of the Zheng drug trafficking organization's many online companies. Two Chinese nationals were charged for running the global drug trafficking ring and importing controlled substances into the United States.<sup>23</sup>
24. 200,000 people die every year from counterfeit or substandard anti-malarial drugs, 160,000 of which are from sub-Saharan Africa. Many of these fake medicines originate in India or China.<sup>24</sup>
25. It was determined that a man responsible for distributing opioids that resulted in several overdose deaths in northeastern Ohio in 2016 had ordered the drugs from a Chinese website and was redistributing them from one of his online companies.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> DOJ Press Release: "New York Man Admits Distributing Synthetic Drug Leading to Overdose Death" (March 28, 2018); available at <https://www.justice.gov/usao-nj/pr/new-york-man-admits-distributing-synthetic-drug-leading-overdose-death>

<sup>19</sup> DOJ Press Release: "Lakeside Gang Member Indicted in Fentanyl Overdose Death" (April 11, 2018); available at <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdca/pr/lakeside-gang-member-indicted-fentanyl-overdose-death>

<sup>20</sup> DOJ Press Release: "Members of Fentanyl Trafficking Conspiracy Charged with Drug Distribution Resulting in Death, Money Laundering, and Firearms Offenses" (July 13, 2018) available at <https://www.justice.gov/usao-nh/pr/members-fentanyl-trafficking-conspiracy-charged-drug-distribution-resulting-death-money>

<sup>21</sup> DOJ Press Release: "Oncologist and Office Manager Sentenced in Connection with Administering Unapproved, Foreign Drugs" (May 21, 2018) available at <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndny/pr/oncologist-and-office-manager-sentenced-connection-administering-unapproved-foreign>

<sup>22</sup> ABC11.com: "I-Team: Online Pharmacy Shutting Down After Selling Fake Cancer Drugs," (July 9, 2018) available at <https://abc11.com/health/i-team-online-pharmacy-shutting-down-after-selling-fake-cancer-drugs/3733321/>

<sup>23</sup> DOJ Press Release: "Two Chinese Nationals Charged With Operating Global Opioid and Drug Manufacturing Conspiracy Resulting in Deaths" (August 22, 2018) available at <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/two-chinese-nationals-charged-operating-global-opioid-and-drug-manufacturing-conspiracy>

<sup>24</sup> TheConversation.com: "Fake drugs are one reason malaria still kills so many," (April 24, 2018) available at <https://theconversation.com/fake-drugs-are-one-reason-malaria-still-kills-so-many-92712>

<sup>25</sup> VOANews.com: "Chinese Businessman Pleads Guilty of Importing Opioids," (August 7, 2018) available at <https://www.voanews.com/a/chinese-businessman-bin-wang-pleads-guilty-to-importing-opioids/4517815.html>

26. Facebook's negligence of illegal opioids sales on their platform likely led to around 72,000 drug overdose deaths within the last year.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> TechCrunch.com: "Facebook Cracks Down on Opioid Dealers After Years of Neglect," (August 16, 2018) available at <https://techcrunch.com/2018/08/16/facebook-opioid-searches/>